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ABSTRACT

This speech outlines the programs, practices, and policies of public education that help or hamper ethnic diversification of curriculum. It also examines curriculum assumptions from which the programs, practices, and policies have emerged. Studies are utilized as a support base throughout the speech with references presented at the end. While the author concludes that the content of an ethnically diverse program should pervade the entire curriculum, he stresses that the prior sin of exclusion should not be compounded by the sin of careless inclusion. Generalizations about any ethnic group and stereotypes, the author states, are not to be desired. Implications about teacher education pervade the speech. A 10-item bibliography is included. (Author/JA)

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ETHNIC DIVERSITY: FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF CURRICULAR ASSUMPTIONS

or

ETHNIC DIVERSITY: A CLOSE, HARD LOOK AT CURRICULAR ASSUMPTIONS

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Curriculum for ethnic diversity is often construed as jargon for a unit on minorities or a day spent in commemoration of a certain racial or ethnic group. All too often an elective course in race relations or minority groups is offered to the secondary student in the name of ethnic diversity. On the elementary level activities are conducted in the name of "Mexican American Day, Black Achievement Week," etc. (Boyer and Hill, 1973).

This type of curriculum planning conveys to the student that activities for ethnic diversity demonstrate that one group of Americans contribute more to the American than any other group and that ethnic diversity is not a reality in the greater American society. The curriculum that teaches Indian children that Christopher Columbus discovered America or that teaches Chicano children that Zebulon Pike discovered "Pike's Peak" ignores the early exploratory contributions of the Indian and Spanish people. Further, this curriculum is based on the assumption, and misconception, that one group of American people made most of the important contributions to the American culture, and that all other groups had better melt into the bubbling pot of the dominant group if they wish to make equally important contributions. This curriculum is not based on the assumption that we live in a pluralistic

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society in which conflicts of economic and political interests occur, and through these conflicts, important contributions to the entire society are made.

Curriculum planning for ethnic diversity requires a wholistic scope. Simply adding ethnic courses to an already fragmented and over-specialized academic program will not provide the learner experiences that are ethnically diverse. Tyler advanced the thesis that the curriculum is all of the experiences the school offers the learner (Tyler, 1969). At first sight, the thesis seems simple enough. Serving tamale pie in the school cafeteria is a Chicano experience the school offers the learner just as is exposure to the issues surrounding the Mexican American War. But as with a gestalt figure, the whole of Tyler's thesis is greater than the sum of the parts. School policies, teacher practices, and program contents interlock and pervade the curriculum. A Chicano Studies course taught in a school that enforces a No Spanish rule, i.e., a rule that prohibits the speaking of Chicano Spanish on school premises, is working at odds against itself. The thesis becomes more complex when one considers that the assumption bases of school policies, teacher practices, and program contents are couched in the value system of all those involved in the school system's decision-making process.

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What, then, should a curriculum for ethnic diversity teach? The purpose of such a curriculum should be to teach that pluralism is good, that there is strength in diversity, and that the melting pot philosophy is no longer viable in our mobile, interfused society. What this requires is a close, hard look at the assumptions upon which the curriculum is based. Tyler's thesis provides a framework from which curricular assumptions can be inferred.

Policy and Ethnic Diversity

Usually, school policy is stated in guidelines which enumerate the school rules but which do not elucidate the assumptions upon which the rules are based. Regrettably, it is the policy's assumptions that can mitigate for or against ethnic diversity. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1972) found, in its research on school policy in Mexican American schools in the Southwest, that five out of every ten schools serving poor Mexican American barrios enforced a No Spanish rule as part of an assimilation policy. Under this rule, the Chicano student was prohibited from speaking his native language on school premises; a violator of the rule was summarily punished by various indignities, i.e., the

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Chicano student was sentenced to do time in a Spanish detention room or required to write an essay on why he should not speak Spanish in school. The Commission found that the reasons for enforcement of the rule were not always related to the educational needs of the Chicano student. Some educators described Chicano Spanish as "Tex-Mex," a pejorative label to describe the Chicano Spanish dialect as hybrid, and other educators felt that speaking anything but English in school was symbolic disloyality to the American culture.

Carter found that the No Spanish rule was one among many rules that prohibited any demonstration of Chicanoness on the part of the Chicano students in the Southwestern schools (Carter, 1970). Such rules create negative associations toward the Chicano culture which in turn negates attempts to teach appreciation for the culture to either Chicano or Anglo students. Such assumptions as (1) English is the only legitimate language in America, (2) Chicano Spanish is an inferior calo or dialect, or (3) the native language of a student should not be recognized in school are not founded in sound, pedagogical research nor are they justifiable in a pluralistic society.

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Practices and Ethnic Diversity

Teacher practices pervade the entire curriculum and can mitigate for or against ethnic diversity. It is through the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the teacher that the student learns the message of the curriculum. Teacher expectations are well documented (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Students come to see themselves in the classroom setting as their teachers behave toward them. The teacher's responsibility is to avoid behavior that encourages low or negative expectations among his students--a most serious responsibility.

Yet, practices do have effects. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1973) conducted a study on the verbal behavior of teachers toward Chicano and Anglo students in Southwestern schools. Using Flanders system of interaction analysis, the Commission found that the teachers were communicating less with Chicano students, that the teachers were praising Chicano students less, and that the teachers were posing difficult cognitive questions less to Chicano students when compared to the teachers' verbal behavior toward the Anglo students. Apparently, the teachers were operating on the assumptions that (1) Chicano students are basically reticent and uncommunicative, (2) Chicano students are not capable of

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handling difficult cognitive questions, (3) Chicano students require little or no praise. Not only do these assumptions, and practices thereof, encourage low self-expectations on the part of the Chicano students, but they are also not supported by research (Coleman, 1966).

Certainly, teacher practices that verbally isolate the student and create low expectations for him mitigate against ethnic diversity. If teacher practices do not allow exchange of ideas and viewpoints, and if they do not allow an open and free atmosphere in the classroom, then affirmative policies and program contents for ethnic diversity are of little avail.

Content and Ethnic Diversity

The content of an ethnically diverse program should pervade the entire curriculum. But how can a physics teacher teach his content and ethnic diversity? Why not teach Newton's laws of force with a bow and arrow, a sophisticated tool which utilizes complex processes of force, tension, and energy? Or how can a physical education teacher teach ethnic diversity? The games known to Indians would make excellent variety in a physical education class.

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The content of an ethnic program must be evaluated carefully if the prior sin of exclusion is not to be compounded by the sin of careless inclusion. Materials must be examined carefully to determine whether they portray an ethnic group authentically. All Indians, all Chicanos, all Blacks, as well as Anglos, are not alike. Diversity exists within any ethnic group. American Indian educator, Dr. Russell Dobson, asserted that any generalization about the American Indian is automatically wrong since every tribe is different in kind and degree (Dobson, 1973).

A unit on the Mexican American that advances the thesis that the Mexican American identifies with the cultures of Mexico and the United States is only partially correct. Within the Mexican American culture there are Spanish Colonists who identify with a Spanish culture that dates back to Oñate and the early Spanish colonization period (Rendon, 1971); there are other Mexican Americans who have assimilated into the general American culture and do not identify with any Hispanic culture (Hernandez, 1971).

The flip side of the authentic coin is whether the content portrays stereotypes. Traditionally, the

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Mexican American was portrayed in curricula as a rustic, rural fellow who procrastinated; he lived in the land of mañana, was essentially lazy, and slept (la siesta)his productive hours away under a serape and a sombrero. On occasion, however, he could rise to a revolution; he could don bullet belts, a sinister laugh, and ride off to the latest revolution (Acuña, 1972). Given these portrayals, both the Chicano and Anglo students learn that the Mexican American is either lazy or violent depending on the circumstances. The vital art, the energetic music, and the complex mathematics contributed by the Chicano are lost in the stereotypes.

Again, it is necessary to examine the assumptions implicit in the content of the material. Materials that portray a group inauthentically, or materials that portray stereotypes are inappropriate. Lessons planned around comparisons and contrasts, showing the similarities and differences between the myths and realities of a particular group, could dispel stereotypes and represent the group authentically.

Examination of curricular assumptions is most difficult. It requires a close, hard look at beliefs implicit in the school's policies, teachers' practices, and program

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contents. What is most difficult is that curriculum for ethnic diversity challenges the assumptions of the melting pot philosophy, the philosophy that has for so long guided the thinking of educators. Yet, our mobile, interfused society continues to grow, and with the growth comes students to our classes who represent sundry ethnic and racial groups. Although the examples in this writing were located in the Southwest, this is not to mean that schools in other parts of the country are not faced with similar concerns. Peoples of all kind can be found in any state in the Union. Understanding the learner, his social and cultural experiences, is by now a platitude that bears close attention.

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